REMARKS

Claims 1-30 are presently pending. Claims 1 and 18 have been amended. Claim 30 has been added.

Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the application in view of the foregoing amendments and the remarks appearing below.

Rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103

The Examiner has rejected claims 1-29 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being obvious in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,338,050 to Conklin et al. in view of Official Notice and ordinary skill in the art. In particular, the Examiner states that Conklin et al. disclose all of the elements of these claims except supplying collateral material and an email address that is an alias. The Examiner takes Official Notice that it was "old and well known at the time of the invention to provide business cards to individuals common to a web-site and provide access to that web-site to gather general information." In addition, Examiner asserts that it was "old and well known at the time of the invention to supply disguised email addresses to buyers." The Examiner then asserts that it would have been obvious to a person having ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to utilize collateral information and aliased email in the Conklin et al. method and system so as to render the rejected claims obvious. Applicant respectfully disagrees.

Turning to the Conklin et al. patent, Applicant acknowledges the Examiner's Note stating that although the Examiner has referenced specific passages of the Conklin et al. patent, Applicant should consider the patent in its entirety. Applicant has considered the Conklin et al. patent in its entirety and provides the following summary.

Conklin et al. disclose a multivariate negotiations system (02, FIG. 1a) that allows participants (08a-h, FIG. 1a), e.g., buyers and sellers, to negotiate with one another on a plurality of terms of various types of agreements, e.g., sales contracts, in an on-line forum. Central to the system is a multivariate negotiations engine (212, FIG. 1d) that drives the negotiation functionality. In conjunction with the multivariate negotiations system, Conklin et al. also disclose a method of negotiating agreements using the system.

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For each type of negotiation there is a community sponsor (06, FIG. 1a) that sponsors corresponding negotiations. Conklin et al. provide a number of examples of community sponsors, including a computer industry standards organization (col. 17, line 39 et seq.) and an international trade organization (col. 26, line 11 et seq.), among others. Regarding the computer industry standards organization, this organization may utilize the multivariate negotiations engine to establish a computer industry standards community that allows participants, e.g., computer manufactures and interested computer organizations, to interact and negotiate with one another to develop the subject standards.

Regarding the international trade organization, this organization may utilize the multivariate negotiation engine to implement an international trade community that facilitates various negotiations between companies in different countries. For example, a company in the U.S. designing a new magnetic storage drive may utilize the multivariate negotiations engine to negotiate, among other things, arrangements with a Korean vendor of read/write heads with respect to providing samples of its read/write heads to facilitate design and to negotiate a supply contract if the U.S. company deems that vendor's read/write heads suitable. In this latter example, the sponsor may have the multivariate negotiations system configured to allow buyers and sellers to become aware of the other's existence so as to create trade that may otherwise not have occurred.

Generally, the Conklin et al. system is arranged as follows. The multivariate negotiations engine and most supporting components reside on a server connected to the Internet. Typically, but not necessarily, this server is a standalone server relative to any server(s) that the sponsor may have and/or use to connect to the negotiations engine via the Internet and is standalone relative to the server(s) that participants may use to connect to the negotiations engine via the Internet. Alternatively, all or parts of negotiations engine and supporting components may reside on a sponsor's server(s). Regardless of how negotiations engine and supporting components are distributed among servers, as discussed at col. 18, line 47 to col. 19, line 13 and col. 19, lines 38-43, among other places in the Conklin et al. patent, each sponsor is responsible for establishing, maintaining and promoting a sponsored community site, uniform resource locator (URL) and corresponding Webpages.

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Regarding the promotion of sponsored communities, the corresponding sponsors are responsible for promoting the visibility of their communities, e.g., by notifying search engines of their presence on the Internet, e.g., by submitting their uniform resource locators, keywords and other information to the search engines. The Conklin et al. negotiations system includes features to automate this process (col. 28, line 66 et seq.). Once the search engines have been updated, potential participants, e.g., buyers and sellers, may readily locate an appropriate community site and utilize the features provided there, including the vendor and/or customer locating and/or the negotiating features discusses above.

In some embodiments, the negotiations engine is adapted for use by only one sponsor and its corresponding participants. In other embodiments, the negotiations engine may be configured to permit use by multiple sponsors and their respective participants. In both embodiments, each participant and/or sponsor is provided with a unique identifier to ensure the security of the data corresponding to that participant/sponsor. The participants (and the sponsors, depending upon the configuration of the negotiations system) interact with negotiations system using ordinary Web browsers. In this manner, the participants (and sponsors) avoid having to support components of the negotiation system on their computer systems and, consequently, avoid the costs associated therewith.

In contrast to the Conklin et al. multivariate negotiations system and method, the claims of the present application are generally directed to a method and system of providing information to at least one potential customer from an individual business owner, wherein that business owner belongs to a group of many business owners. Regarding independent claim 1, this claim, as amended, requires, among other things, the steps of: (1) supplying collateral material to at least one potential customer, wherein the collateral material includes a group URL of the web-site and a first unique site-code and (2) inputting the first unique site-code to an input field of the web-site by the at least one potential customer so as to access the customized information of the corresponding one of the individual business owners.

In connection with the former step, the Examiner has taken Official Notice that supplying collateral material for promotional purposes was well known in the art at the time of the invention. While this may be true, Applicant asserts that it is not obvious to provide collateral

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information, e.g., a business card, in the context of the Conklin et al. system and method. In other words, Applicant asserts that the Examiner is making the combination in hindsight of the present claims.

As discussed above in the summary of the Conklin et al. disclosure, Conklin et al. emphasize that promotion of the sponsored communities occurs through the submission of information to search engines to make the sponsored community sites searchable. In particular, Conklin et al. disclose that the sponsors promote their sponsored communities by adding their URLs and other information to search engines, e.g., GOOGLE® and ALTAVISTA™, to allow potential participants to learn of the sponsored communities by utilizing these search engines. Conklin is completely silent on any direct solicitation of potential participants by active participants. In fact, Conklin et al. suggest that active participants and potential participants are not even aware of each other's existence until the potential participants locate a sponsored community using a search engine. If the active participants do not even know that potential participants exist, the active participants certainly cannot provide collateral materials to the potential participants. Since Conklin et al. do not so much as suggest that potential participants are directly solicited, let alone provided with collateral material, by sponsors or active participants, Applicant asserts that adding to the Conklin et al. method a step of supplying collateral material to at least one potential customer, as required by independent claim 1, would not have been obvious at the time of the invention.

Regarding the step of inputting the first unique site-code to an input field of the web-site by the at least one potential customer so as to access the unique information of one of the individual business owners, Conklin et al. are completely silent on such a step. In rejecting claim 1, the Examiner directs Applicant to step S06 of FIG. 29 as disclosing the step of the claim 1 at issue. Applicant disagrees that step S06 discloses or even suggests the step of claim 1. In the written description accompanying FIG. 29, Conklin et al. state that "[a]t step S06 the buyer can link to the sites of the sellers listed" as a result of a search conducted by a prospective buyer. See Col. 31, lines 60-62. This appears to be the only disclosure concerning the linking of a potential buyer to a seller's site. Consequently, Conklin et al. appear to be silent on exactly how the prospective buyer links to the sellers' sites. In addition, judging by the fact that the

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search returns a list of seller sites and the fact that other functions of the Conklin et al. system utilize hyperlinks for selecting from among lists of things (see, e.g., FIG. 15a), it is entirely reasonable, and most likely, that the linking is accomplished via hyperlinks. In this case, requiring potential buyers to enter site-codes into an input field would be a step backward in terms of technology and user-friendliness. Accordingly, Applicant asserts that the Examiner could not fairly assert that accessing, via the Conklin et al. system, a seller's site by inputting a site-code into an input field is obvious in view of skill in the art or by another combination, since such an assertion would be counterproductive to the user-friendly hyperlinking that Conklin et al. most likely implement.

Regarding independent claim 18, this claim, as amended, requires, among other things: (1) a host computer that contains both a group web-site common to a group of many business owners and an individual owner's web-site and (2) executable code operatively configured to provide an input field and to permit a potential client to access information customized to the individual owner in response to the potential client inputting a unique site-code into the input field. Applicant submits that Conklin et al. do not disclose or suggest either of these limitations.

Regarding the first limitation, Conklin et al. disclose that the multivariate negotiation system is either implemented on its own site or on a sponsor's site. In either case, the participants', e.g., buyers and sellers, sites (i.e., the sites corresponding to the business owners of claim 18) are separate and distinct from the site that includes the multivariate negotiation system. Conklin et al. explain that the reason for this is so that the business owners do not have to be burdened with maintaining parts of the negotiations system on their own servers. All they need is a web browser to access and utilize the negotiations engine. Consequently, Conklin et al. explicitly teach away from having a web-site common to a plurality of business owners and a web-site of (at least) one of the business owners on the same host computer, as claim 18 requires. To assert otherwise would be to go against the Conklin et al. teachings and, thus, would be improper. It is noted that dependent claim 3 has a similar limitation. Therefore, claim 3 is patentable for essentially the same reason.

Regarding the second limitation directed to the executable code, as discussed above relative to method claim 1, Conklin et al. do not disclose or suggest accessing an individual

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business owner's web-site by inputting a site-code into an input field. Consequently, Conklin et al. likewise do not disclose or suggest executable code operatively configured to provide an input field and to permit a potential client to access information customized to the individual owner in response to the potential client inputting a unique site-code into the input field, as required by amended independent claim 18. Furthermore, as also discussed above in connection with claim 1, it would also be improper to assert that it would have been obvious to provide the Conklin et al. system with such executable code, since it would be counterproductive both in terms of technology and user-friendliness.

For at least the foregoing reasons, the present rejection of claims 1-29 is improper. Therefore, Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner withdraw this rejection.

Patentability of New Claim 30

New claim 30 essentially contains, among other things, the following limitations: (1) a host computer containing information common to all of a plurality of distributors and a parent company; (2) a host computer containing a group web-site and a plurality of distributor web-sites; (3) a group web-site operatively configured to display to the potential customer a site-code field and to provide access to customized information of one of the plurality of distributors in response to the potential customer inputting into the site-code field a unique site-code corresponding to that one of the plurality of distributors.

Regarding limitation (1), neither Conklin et al. nor any other reference of record discloses or suggests a host computer containing information common to both a plurality of distributors and a parent company. As to the Conklin et al. patent, the sponsor cannot reasonably be asserted to be a parent company. Nor do Conklin et al. disclose that the participants, e.g., buyers and sellers, are distributors of a parent company. Regarding limitation (2), as discussed above relative to the rejection of claim 18, Conklin et al. teach away from providing a group web-site and an individual business web-site on a common host computer. In addition, new claim 30 requires that not only one distributor web-site be on the host computer, but that a plurality of distributor web-sites be on the host computer. None of the references of record disclose or suggest this feature in the context of the present invention. Regarding limitation (3), as discussed above relative to the rejection of claims 1 and 18, Conklin et al. do not disclose or

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suggest this feature. Moreover, Applicant believes providing the Conklin et al. system with this feature would be counter to the user-friendliness of the Conklin et al. system.

For at least these reasons, Applicant respectfully submits that new claim 30 is patentable.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 1-30, as amended, are in condition for allowance. Therefore, prompt issuance of a Notice of Allowance is respectfully solicited. If any issues remain, the Examiner is encouraged to call the undersigned attorney at the number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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